HENRY VIII’S LEARNED WIVES

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1. CATHERINE OF ARAGON AND THE HUMANIST CIRCLE
   IN HENRY VIII’S COURT

Catherine of Aragón was born in Alcalá de Henares (Dec., 16th, 1485). She was called after her mother’s grand-mother, Catherine of Lancaster. She received a Renaissance education under the aegis of her mother, Isabel la Católica. With her sisters she was taught by Maríneo Sículo, by Mártil de Anglería, and by the Italian poets Antonio Geraldini and his brother Alessandro.

She grew up in Granada -Campamento de Santa Fe. Her parents gave her a gift: the heraldic emblem of a pomegranate that she took to England, and, for some time, a pomegranate was displayed in the coat of arms of England between the leopards and the lises, besides the red rose of the Tudors.

According to Salvador de Madariaga:

Catalina recibió una educación superior a la de cualquier mujer de cualquier país europeo de la época, salvo quizás de la de algunas jóvenes italianas privilegiadas, y al lado de las labores domésticas, la caza y la cetrería, la historia y la leyenda y la heráldica, sabía bastante latín para manejarlo como lengua viva en conversación y correspondencia, y leer los clásicos. Era la gran época inaugural de la cultura española y en la corte abundaban los humanistas.

She arrived at Plymouth on Oct. 2nd, 1501. When she became queen she managed to create a circle of humanists:
Su propio chamberlán, lord Mountjoy, era uno de los pocos verdaderos humanistas de aquella corte, y fue su amigo personal y su hombre de confianza para la inmensa labor "cultural" (como hoy diríamos) de la reina. Lord Mountjoy (que era primo de la favorita del rey) casó con una dama de las que Catalina había traído de España, Isabel de Villegas. Tanto Catalina como Enrique admiraron a Erasmo (que parece haber estimado más la cultura de la reina que la del rey). Y en su corte se reunieron los humanistas más destacados de Inglaterra y algunos de los mejores de fuera. El médico inglés Linacre escribió una gramática latina para la hija de Catalina que sirvió de texto todo un siglo. Fernando Vitoria, médico de la reina, era de este círculo. (Madariaga, op. cit., pp. 127-28, 113).

The Spanish L. L. Vives then in Louvain, and Catherine, following the suggestions given by Erasmus and Th. More, summoned him to England. Catherine asked him to write a book about humanist instruction for her daughter, Princess Mary (later Philip II’s wife). And Vives produced (1524) De Institutione Foeminae Christianae which in many ways was an innovation. In 1524 Vives published a plan of studies specifically designed for Princess Mary. She was to learn Latin, Greek, etc.²

Catherine was a friend to humanist studies in both universities, helping individual scholars as well as institutions. In particular she favoured St. John’s College, Cambridge. Corpus Christi (Oxford) owns a standing cup decorated with her device of the pomegranate. She visited both universities several times; most importantly, her presence in Oxford with Wolsey in 1518 helped seal the more reactionary "Trojans"³. We can read this testimony from Arte e Historia de España en Inglaterra:

En el Merton College of Oxford encontramos un retrato de la reina española, porque ella era muy latina, como su madre Isabel, y amiga de los escolares y de los humanistas del Renacimiento.⁴
2. HENRY VIII: A RENAISSANCE PRINCE

Henry VIII's historic significance is, without doubt, far-ranging. We Spanish are inclined to belittle his reputation. It is interesting to remark that during 1991, the 5000th anniversary of his birth, the Spanish newspapers contained headings like these: "Enrique VIII, el pionero del divorcio". El día en que Enrique VIII quedó impotente. And in a comment on the book compiled by D. Starkey, a Spanish journalist only paid attention to this point: "Davis Starkey [...] reveló que el rey Enrique VIII de Inglaterra, a pesar de haber tenido seis esposas, no fue un monarca viril como se cree popularmente". Finally, on the cover of the review Historia 16 (184, agosto, 1991), the reader comes across the following statement: "Enrique VIII, el monstruo".

This cliché has been repeated since La Crónica del Rey Enrique Otavo de Inglaterra according to which King Henry is identified with sex, women, divorce, etc. But it is time to change this fixed idea. We have to underline that Henry VIII was a Renaissance Prince in the full meaning to the term. He was scholarly, magnificent, gentle, a poet, musician, sportsman, theologian (Defensor Fidei), patron of artist, promoter of learning, proud, ambitious, manipulator, maquiavélico, vindictive, all at once. Indeed, it is difficult to praise a man who sent two of his once-beloved wives to die on the block, who ordered at least a dozen of his blood relatives, among them a feeble and harmless old woman of 69, to their deaths, and other victims included some 50 monks, priests, and pious laymen revered for their sanctity.

Yet, Henry's personal history is less a tale of calculated villainy than a great promise frustrated. No European monarch ever came to the throne with greater gifts of body and mind than Henry VIII. He was tall, strapping and magnificent, a radiant presence in any setting. The humanists at his court took delight in his learning and his mental agility.

His tireless exploits in the tiltyard were astounding, his horsemanship spectacular, his feats of wrestling and knightly combat unexcelled.

It is well known the testimony of the Venetian traveller (1515):

Su majestad es el potentado más apuesto que he visto en toda mi vida; por encima de la altura normal, con unas pantorrillas
extremadamente finas para sus piernas, su muy clara y brillante tez [...] y una cara redonda tan bellísima que podría transformarse en una bonita mujer, siendo su cuello más bien largo y delgado [...]. Habla francés, inglés y latín, y un poco de italiano: toca bien el laúd y el clavicordio, canta leyendo directamente de un libro, tira el arco con mayor fuerza que cualquier otro hombre en Inglaterra, y participa maravillosamente en las justas. Creáme, es un príncipe de los más consumados en todos los aspectos".  

3. ANNE BOLEYNE AND THE HUMANIST REFORMERS

When speaking about Anne Boleyne we have to start revising a wrong viewpoint. In Spain, in this subject too, we are accustomed to using some specific adjectives: "intrigante", "cortesana", "adúltera", "incestuosa"..., in short, a femme fatale. In Toledo the Corpus procession was opened by a huge monster with the face of Anne Boleyne. Its name was La Tarasca.

The cause of this stereotyped portrait comes from the above mentioned La Crónica del Rey Enrico Otavo, and La Historia Ecclesiástica del Cisma de Inglaterra by Pedro de Rivadeneyra, s. j. published in Alcalá de Henares, 1593.  

The Spanish like to emphasize her physical oddities: on her long and peaceful neck was a very noticeable wø, or cyst, as big as a strawberry, which her necklaces imperfectly concealed, and one of her fingers was slightly deformed; along one side was an outcropping of flesh with some little show of nail-evidently an undeveloped sixth finger.  

Anne’s father, Sir Thomas Boleyn, was serving as ambassador to France for about one year. He wanted his daughter to receive an excellent education at Paris. Although the date remains uncertain, Anne was transferred to the household of the duchess of Alençon at about 1519-20. Her father would have wanted her to attend court regularly in the hope that she might be able to contract an advantageous marriage with a French nobleman.

The French court was a center of learning. Francis I was a king famous for his patronage of arts and letters. In 1516 he did play host to Leonardo da Vinci, who brought the Mona Lisa with him to France (Louvre Museum). His sister Margaret, duchess of Alençon (then Margaret of Navarra)
was a restless, intelligent woman with considerable writing skill. She was the author of both secular (Heptameron) and religious literature. She encouraged a reformist movement -Evangelicalism- and patronised French Humanists.12

Anne spent her formative years absorbing French culture. Not only was fluent in French but she may also have to developed a taste for Franco-Flemish music and French fashion: the portrait of her now at the National Portrait Gallery bears witness to her adoption of French clothing style.13 Her idea of the relations between men and women were formed at that court where, in contrast the old-fashioned chivalry prevalent in England, a sort of relaxed decadence was the norm.

She returned to England at the end of 1521. And by this time Anne was a handsome young woman of eighteen or nineteen. One of her admirers in the court was the poet Wyatt. It was a love affaire. He married (though separated). He called her "mi dulce gacela", according to the Spanish translations.14

In the court Anne, marchioness of Pembroke, was set on the following goals: to please the king who was a notorious theologian, and to see to it that the Scriptures were read in the vernacular.

This second point was influenced by both religious and political motives; in fact, religion was a political instrument. Catherine of Aragón liked translations into Latin or Greek but she did not like translations into English or Spanish. Anne Boleyn, by contrast, supported the cause of vernacular Scripture (English as well as French) and because of that she helped in the development of English language. Though Humanists had earlier expressed approval and even enthusiasm or vernacular Scripture, the appearance of doctrinally suspect translations (which had become identified with Lutheranism) had caused the English authorities (Henry VIII) to prohibit unauthorised versions. Yet Anne owned a number of illicit books (she could not read Latin books) and also assisted those who were involved in the trade.

Her chaplain, W. Latimer, records that Anne kept an English Bible on a desk in her chamber so that her household people could read it. Undoubtedly this was her copy of W. Tyndale's forbidden New Testament of 1534, now in the British Library.

William Tyndale had tried to translate the New Testament into English, but Henry VIII has forbidden this kind of translations and Tyndale fled to
Antwerp where he printed 6,000 copies of his New Testament which were brought to England by smuggling, and Anne owned one of them.

Some years before, Tyndale, to gain the favour of the king, had written in 1528 a book, *Obedience of a Christian Man* and Anne had requested Henry to read it. Apparently he thoroughly enjoyed it, exclaiming: "this booke ys for me and all kinges to rede" (Warnicke, *op. cit.*, p. 112). In this book Tyndale justified challenging papal power and enhancing the authority of the secular ruler. By bringing the *Obedience* to Henry’s attention Anne had encouraged him to "delyver his subjects owt of the Egyptione darkness and papal bondage" (Ibid., p. 113).

But Emperor Charles V arrested Tyndale and had him beheaded in a castle near Brussels (1538). The basis (c. 60%) of the New Testament of the King James Version (1611) was Tyndale’s translation.\textsuperscript{15}

Anne supported *A Supplication for the Beggars* by Simon Fish, which was an extremely biased anti-clerical work. She did present the *Supplication* to Henry who, because he enjoyed it, reportedly favoured its author until his death in 1531. (Warnicke, *op. cit.*, p. 112).

Anne’s interest in vernacular Scripture led some translators to hope for her patronage. The exile, George Joye, in 1533, printed two pages of Genesis in a large format and sent one copy to the king, and another to the new queen.

Anne was prepared to help those who suffered through involvement in the forbidden book trade: W. Locke, Th. Alway and R. Herman among others. (Ibid., pp. 111, 153-55, 170-71).

Catherine’s rival and supplanter, Anne Boleyn, provides a contrast to her eduction, and consequently in intellectual tastes. While Catherine patronised Humanists like Erasmus and Vives, Anne was drawn to the more evangelical variety of French humanism, to scholars like Jacques Lefévre d’Etaples and Clement Marot. (Dowling, *art. cit.*, p. 39).

J. Lefévre d’Etaples (near Calais) lived in the court of Francis I and his sister, the duchess of Alençon. Incidentally, L. Vives when he stayed in Paris (1509-12) met him. He is well known for his translation of the Bible into French (1523-30). It was the first translation of the Scriptures into French and he dedicated it to Henry and Anne. On the very cover of the book H-A appeared twice. Anne owned a copy of this. He founded a movement called Evangelicalism (very similar to Devotio Moderna), the main points of which are described by R. García Villoslada:
Lo que él (J. Lefévre) desea es una renovación interior, una honda penetración del Evangelio en las almas, una vida de fe y amor, ¿Cómo conseguirlo? Por la difusión de los libros sagrados en el pueblo.  

Evangelicalism and Devotio Moderna sought an inner religion, more biblical, in contrast to a more external one, based on devotions, miracles, relics, saints and the like.

Anne also befriended the French poets Nicolas Bourbon and Etienne Dolet. Anne while dwelling in Paris became acquainted with Clément Marot, the principal poet of the French Renaissance. He wrote a poem: Sermon of the Good Pastor and the Bad. Henry is described as a second Ezekiel sent by God to reform abuses, and Anne receives pious good wishes:

O Lady Anne. O queen incomparable, may this good shepherd with whom you find favour give you a son.

NOTES

8.- This Crónica del Rey Enrico Otavo de Inglaterra appeared anonymously was written by a contemporary Spanish author. Antonio de Guaras, a Spanish merchant who lived in London in the last years of the king Henry, is supposed to be the author of this Crónica. There is an available edition by Marqués de Molins in Sucesores de Rivadeneyra, Madrid 1874.


11.- Madariaga, S. de; op. cit., p. 138. "Ana Boleña que andaba siempre con guantes y gestos ocultando un como muñón de un sexto dedo que le afectaba la mano izquierda". Gossip liked to talk about her three breasts because of the mentioned wen.


17.- Quoted by M. Dowling, art. cit., p. 40.